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ABSTRACT

A survey investigated the attitudes of 52 elementary school teachers of limited-English-proficient (LEP) students concerning their preference for product- or process-oriented writing strategies for this population. The teachers were administered a questionnaire on which they indicated preference, on a four-point scale, for 28 product- and process-oriented writing strategies identified as most commonly used by English-monolingual and bilingual students during the composing process. Results indicate the teachers perceived the process-oriented strategies as most important for teaching LEP students, in contrast to earlier studies that suggest process-oriented writing strategies are little used in the English-as-a-Second-Language classroom. In addition, years of teaching experience had little effect on preference for process-oriented vs. product-oriented strategies. (Author/MSE)

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WRITING INSTRUCTION FOR LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS: A SURVEY OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

Laurie R. Weaver
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Abstract

Improving writing instruction for Hispanic limited English proficient (LEP) students in our nations schools is of concern to educators today. Since teachers teach what they perceive to be important (Mayer, 1985; Nespor, 1985), it is essential to identify whether instruction in process-oriented writing strategies is perceived to be a worthwhile approach by teachers who work with LEP students. This study, therefore, examines whether teachers perceive instruction in process or product-oriented writing strategies as more important to teach to LEP students. The subjects in the present study were 52 elementary school teachers of ESL students. The Writing Strategy Survey (WSS) was administered to all the teachers. The WSS is a four-point Likert-type scale questionnaire consisting of 28 product and process strategies that have previously been identified by research as those used by English-monolingual and bilingual students during the composing process (see e.g., Padrón & Bermúdez, 1988). Results of the survey indicate teachers perceived process-oriented strategies as the most important to teach LEP students.

Improving writing instruction for Hispanic limited English proficient (LEP) students in our nations schools is of concern to educators today. Achievement scores, in general, for the LEP student are low (Lindholm, 1990). Writing, in particular, has been found to be a difficult task for students attending school in their second language. Writing is a difficult task for the LEP student because it is, as Cummins (1988) describes, a context-reduced task. A context-reduced task is characterized by reliance on linguistic clues to meaning and on knowledge of the language itself. In comparison, a context-embedded task is one in which the participants are able to negotiate the meaning and receive feedback about whether the message has been understood. There are many situational and contextual clues to aid understanding of context-embedded tasks, however, the opposite is true of context-reduced tasks. Writing, then, is a context-reduced task for LEP students since there are few contextual clues to aid the student and a high degree of knowledge of the language is required.

Instruction in process writing, an approach whereby students learn to see writing as a cyclical process in which development of writing skills occurs through trial and error (Connor, 1987; Silberman, 1989), has been found to improve the writing skills of monolingual English-speaking students (Calkins, 1983; Graves, 1983; Scardamalia, 1984). Often, instructional practices that have been found to be successful for the monolingual, English-speaking students have also been found to be useful with LEP students (e.g., Padrón, 1991, 1992).

This present study, therefore, was designed to survey inservice teachers about their perceptions of process and product-oriented writing. Since teachers

teach what they perceive to be important and what they think is most beneficial for their students (Mayer, 1985; Nespor, 1985), it is important to identify whether instruction in process-oriented writing is perceived to be a worthwhile approach by teachers who work with LEP students. More specifically, this study examined whether teachers of ESL students consider it more important to teach students to use product-oriented strategies such as being concerned with neatness of the paper, thinking about spelling, and focusing on grammar (see e.g., Padrón & Bermúdez, 1988) or process-oriented strategies such as planning and revising (Krapels, 1990). It is hypothesized that preservice and in service teachers, who teach ESL students, will perceive process-oriented strategy instruction as an effective approach for teaching writing to their students.

Process Writing Instruction

A distinction can be made between the traditional, product-centered model of teaching writing and the recent, process-centered approach. According to Connor (1987), the product-centered model stresses the importance of style. Writing is considered linear and students are taught to determine the end point of their writing before they even begin to write. The product itself is the goal of the writing task with this approach. In contrast, the process-centered approach to writing instruction emphasizes writing as a cyclical process (Connor, 1987). Instruction is concerned with encouraging students to write for real people and for real purposes (Graves, 1983). Thus, students taught with a process approach learn to consider audience, purpose, and context of writing (Connor, 1987; Roen, 1989).

Silberman (1989) describes the cyclical nature of writing as consisting of a variety of activities, namely, planning, drafting, conferring, revising, and drafting again. The author stresses that this in not something that can be taught as a step-by-step procedure but is better characterized as recursive in nature. Both Graves (1983) and Silberman (1989) describe the first stage of writing as a preparation period in which writers daydream, doodle, read, and think about what they are going to say. The drafting stage is one of selecting words and phrases, composing, rereading one's writing, and composing again. After rereading and conferring with others, writers revise their work, which results in expanding and refining the content (Calkins, 1983). This is the third stage. Finally, editing occurs and the correct structural form is focused upon (Silberman, 1989). Throughout the composing process, writers move and forth through the various stages until the final version is published and shared with others (Calkins, 1983).

Writing Strategies Research

In order to assist students to become better writers, researchers have also examined what strategies writers use as they write and which strategies lead the writer to be considered successful or unsuccessful. A variety of terms are used to describe these writers, among them: expert and novice (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986); proficient and inexperienced (Hall, 1990); and basic and competent (Monahan, 1984). The expert writer has been found to use process strategies (see Table 1) such as planning, translating, and revising when writing (Humes, 1983), whereas the novice writer focuses on product strategies such as being

concerned with spelling and mechanics (Monahan, 1984; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986).

Planning is a thinking process engaged in throughout the composing process. According to Humes (1983), setting goals, organizing content, and prewriting activities such as making notes and mapping, are all aspects of planning. Expert writers have been found to engage in some type of planning of what they were going to write before writing (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986). In addition, they use a wide range of activities when planning; while, the novice writers use fewer to no planning activities before writing.

Translating refers to writing, drafting, and transcribing while composing (Humes, 1983). According to Humes (1983), translating is the process of changing meaning from thought to graphic representation, both of which are forms of symbolization. Years of practice with handwriting, spelling, and grammar allow the writer to automatize these skills making translating a quick endeavor. Research, for example, has found that expert writers are able to write quickly with spelling and punctuation being automatized, whereas novice writers were slower and became bogged down with mechanics (Monahan, 1984; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986)

In a process-oriented approach to teaching writing, revision encompasses not only surface level changes, but lexical and discourse level ones as well (Connor & Farmer, 1990). Revising not only consists of editing tasks such as correcting spelling and punctuation, it also consists of rewriting sections of the composition by reorganizing the content and/or adding new material. In regards to revisions, revising was found to occur across all drafts in the work of the expert writers (Hall, 1990; Monahan, 1984; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986). Their revisions changed entire sentences rather than just words (Hall, 1990; Monahan, 1984) and transformed the meaning of what they had written (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986). In contrast, the novice writers were more likely to see revision as a last-draft-only activity (Hall, 1990; Monahan, 1990) and novice writers tended to focus on cosmetic changes instead of content ones (Hall, 1990).

Limited English Proficient Students and Process Writing

Research conducted with self-report surveys or think-aloud protocols has examined the strategies that LEP elementary, secondary, and university level students report using when writing (Padrón & Bermúdez, 1988; Raimes, 1985). Padrón and Bermúdez (1988), for example, examined the writing strategies that elementary and secondary students in traditional, English monolingual and in bilingual/ESL classes reported using when writing. Using a self-report questionnaire, Padrón and Bermúdez (1988) surveyed 866 elementary and secondary students. They found that students in the traditional (i.e., all English monolingual) classrooms reported using significantly more process strategies than did the students in the ESL classrooms. Nonetheless, all students in the study reported using more product strategies than process strategies. Similarly, using a think-aloud protocol approach whereby students describe into a tape recorder what they are doing as they write, Raimes (1985) examined the writing strategies of LEP students in a college level developmental composition course. The findings of this quasi-experimental study were similar to those of Padrón and Bermúdez (1988) in that the subjects in Raimes' study also reported using few

process strategies when they wrote. In the Raimes' study, for example, students showed little awareness of audience, even when the audience was specified. Raimes (1985) noted that the students spent little time in prewriting/planning their writing and they also spent little time revising and rarely wrote a new draft. In addition, most of the students' revisions were found to be of the surface type. Thus, the work of Padrón and Bermúdez (1988) and of Raimes (1985) indicates that some LEP students are not using strategies that have been found to be effective for monolingual English-speaking students.

Several experimental and case studies have found that a process approach did indeed lead to more effective writing being produced by LEP students (Bermúdez & Prater, 1990; Edelsky, 1982, 1986; Urzua, 1987). According to Graves (1983), conferences are an essential part of the writing process. The presence of a listener often encourages the students to become readers of their own texts (Calkins,1983) and these interactions between the listeners and the writers often lead to revisions in the writers' work. Urzua (1987), for example, examined the effect peer conferencing had on LEP students' writing. The researchers met with four upper elementary Asian students for 45 minutes, once a week, for 15 weeks. During this time period, the students engaged in peer conferences. The resultant writing pieces produced by these students were analyzed in regards to their sense of audience, sense of voice, and sense of power in writing. The results indicated a growth in the students' writing in all three areas.

Edelsky (1982, 1986) using writing samples from 524 students in three bilingual classes found that using the writing process helped students to have an understanding of audience. In this study, the students were enrolled in a program that emphasized writing for real purposes for a variety of audiences (Edelsky, 1982). Many students' compositions were found to take into account their audience as demonstrated by use of arrows and other marks to show the reader where to read next, or where a word should be added when reading. The students also seemed to differentiate between readers who were insiders and outsiders and provided outsiders with more precise information.

In terms of planning to write, one strategy that has been used effectively with monolingual-English-speaking students is mapping. Mapping, as described by Calkins (1983), is a prewriting task that is often also used to stimulate discussion during a reading lesson. Bermúdez and Prater (1990) studied the effect of that instruction in mapping on LEP students' writing. In their quasi-experimental study, the same teacher presented three, two day reading lessons based on three different stories in a basal reader to two groups of LEP students. One group received a traditional reading lesson while the other group engaged in a mapping activity. Both groups wrote a paragraph at the end of the lesson. Although no significant differences were found in regards to the students' fluency (number of words and main ideas) nor in organization of their writing, a significant difference was found in elaboration. The results indicated that the students who had been instructed with mapping produced more elaboration in their paragraphs. That is, they had included more ideas that went beyond the text material (as determined by two independent readings of each essay by two trained graduate students). The researchers concluded that perhaps representing concepts graphically aids the LEP writers to elaborate upon their discussion of materials. Through mapping activities, their prior knowledge may

be activated and linkages with the new knowledge may be formed. Results from these studies in (Bermúdez & Prater, 1990; Edelsky, 1982, 1986; Urzua , 1987) indicate that writing process instruction may improve the writing produced by the ESL students.

The Role of the Teacher

The change from a product-oriented approach to writing instruction to a process-oriented approach, also changes the role of the teacher. When the focus is on the end product, the teacher is seen as the "editor with the red pen" (Connelly, 1990). That is, the teacher's role is to examine a student's paper for grammatical errors, mark the errors with a red pen, then allow the student to recopy the composition making the indicated corrections. With a process-oriented approach to teaching writing, the teacher's role changes from editor to facilitator.

In a process-oriented approach to writing, the teacher's role is to facilitate the student's writing by focusing on the content first (Beeker, 1981; Calkins, 1983; Chew, 1984; Connelly, 1990; Graves, 1983; McKay, 1983). Research investigating the instruction received by LEP students, however, has found that the emphasis is still being placed on form rather than content (Zamel, 1987,1990). Zamel (1987, 1990) , for example, has found that, in contrast to what pedagogy says is effective writing instruction, writing is still strictly controlled by the teacher. Language skills tend to be hierarchically sequenced in the classrooms of the ESL students and writing is the last of the four language skills to be introduced to the students

In order to assist students in developing their writing skills, teachers using a process approach to writing instruction should make no assumptions regarding the students' abilities (Chew, 1984; McKay, 1983). The language of the students should be enhanced by reading to them, asking them questions, and exposing them to a variety of forms of writing (McKay, 1983). Finally, Connelly, (1990) and McKay (1983) stress that students need to learn to evaluate their own writing. Through individual conferences with the teacher and with peer group conferences, students are provided the opportunity to practice revising their own work (Calkins, 1983; Graves, 1983).

If students are to be able to use process writing strategies effectively, they must be instructed in their use (Chew, 1984; McKay, 1983). Therefore, the teacher's role is to give students practice in writing for different audiences and for different purposes. Considering the changing role of the teacher in a process oriented approach to teaching writing and the lack of instruction using this process in classrooms with ESL students, it is important to examine teachers' perceptions towards the product-process strategies.

The present study surveyed in service teachers about their perceptions of writing strategies that are important to teach to LEP students. It is hypothesized that in service teachers, who teach ESL students, will perceive process-oriented strategy instruction as an effective approach for teaching writing to their students. This may be particularly true for these participants, since they are all currently enrolled in courses at the university and have been exposed to this approach.

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Method

Subjects

The subjects in the present study were 52 elementary school teachers of ESL students. These participants were in service teachers that were all enrolled in graduate level courses at the university. The university is an upper division institution located in the southwest region of the United States. There were 5 males and 47 females. The ages of the participants were as follows: 40% were between the ages of 26-35; 30% were between 36-45 years of age; 22% were between the ages of 18-25; and 8% were older than 45 years of age. Approximately half (51.9%) of the participants were Caucasian; 34.6 % were of Mexican American heritage; 3.8% were African American; while Native American (1.9%) and Asian/Pacific Islander (1.9%) each accounted for less than two percent of the teachers surveyed.

Slightly more than half (57.1 %) of the teachers had less than one year teaching experience in an ESL program. Teachers with 1-3 years of teaching experience comprised 24.5% of the teachers surveyed; 12.2% had between 4-6 years of teaching experience in an ESL classroom; and 6.1% of the teachers had been teaching in an ESL classroom for 7-10 years. None of the teachers had experience teaching in an ESL classroom for more than 10 years. However, the total number of years that these subjects has been teaching reflected a more experienced population. For example, 27.5% had taught less than one year; 23.5% had taught 1-3 years; 15.7% had taught 4-6 years; 19.6 had 7-10 years of teaching experience; and 13.7% had over 10 years of teaching experience.

More than half of the in service teachers (69.4%) were in the process of completing their bilingual/ESL certification. Of the remaining teachers surveyed, 22.4% had completed their bilingual/ESL certification between 1987-1992, while 8.2% had completed certification between 1975-1980. None of the participants were certified before 1980.

Instrument

The Writing Strategy Survey (WSS) was administered to all the teachers. The instrument was adapted from the Writing Skills Inventory designed by Padrón and Bermúdez (1988). The WSS is a four-point Likert-type scale questionnaire consisting of three sections. The first section provides demographic information about the teachers who participated in the study. Items on the demographic questionnaire included gender, age, grade level taught, number of years taught in ESL classrooms and total number of years teaching. Section 2 of the WSS lists 28 strategies that previously been identified by current research as those used by English-monolingual and bilingual students during the composing process (see e.g., Padrón & Bermúdez, 1988). Twenty-one of the items describe strategies that have been identified as process-oriented strategies. Seven items described strategies identified as product-oriented strategies. Product and process strategies were randomly placed throughout the survey. In this section, subjects respond on a four-point scale indicating the importance they placed on teaching students to use each strategy. The scale consisted of: (1) not important, (2) somewhat important, (3) important, (4) very important. The third section listed the same set of strategies again and asked the

respondents to rate each strategy in terms of how difficult each one would be to teach to LEP students. The scale consisted of: (1) not difficult, (2) somewhat difficult, (3) difficult, (4) very difficult, and (5) don't know. An estimated reliability coefficient of .70 was obtained on the survey using the Kuder-Richardson 20 formula.

Procedures

The Writing Strategy Survey (WSS) was administered by the researchers to the teachers during class time at the beginning of the semester. The survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Results

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations for all variables. A score of 4 indicates that teachers perceived this strategy to be "Very Important"; 3 indicates that the strategy is "Important"; 2 "Somewhat Important", and 1 "Not Important". In terms of the strategies that teachers' perceived as important to teach ESL students, the following three strategies received the highest ratings: Have Students Use Their Own Experiences (M= 3.55; SD= .67); Concentrate on Ideas and not Words (M= 3.48; SD=.58); and Jot Down Ideas While Writing (M= 3.29; SD= .72). The least important strategies, according to the teachers were: Focus on Spelling /Mechanics (M= 1.67; SD= .83); Change Spelling/Mechanics During Writing (M= 1.59; SD= .75); and Finish Quickly (M= 1.29; SD= .57).

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Teachers' Perceptions of the Importance of Teaching Writing Strategies to LEP Students

Strategies	M	S
Plan Goals of the Story	3.11	.89
Think of Words in the Native Language	2.94	83
Say Story to Themselves Before Writing	2.86	.93
Write Neatly	2.06	1.01
Have Students Use Own Experiences	3.53	1.70
Think About the Reader	3.00	.72
Guess the Spelling of a Word	2.83	.95
Begin to Write Immediately	1.83	.91
Finish Quickly	1.25	.55
Focus on Spelling/Mechanics	1.69	.82
Revise Stories after Completion	2.63	1.03
Focus on What the Teacher Wants	2.22	1.90
Use the Dictionary to Check Spelling	1.86	1.05
Think in Native Language; Translate to English	2.58	.84
Look up Words in the Dictionary When Finished	2.39	.96
Imitate Styles of Good Writers	2.50	1.06
Use Imagery	3.25	.77
Get Help from Other Students	2.78	.83
Concentrate on Idea, not Words	3.44	.56
Jot Down Ideas While Writing	3.33	.72
Change Spelling/Mechanics During Writing	1.47	.65
Talk About Ideas to Others	3.11	.79
Revise to Change Meaning	2.22	.80
Revise to Facilitate Reader Understanding	2.50	.91
Change Plans Before Starting	1.67	.79
Think of New Ideas After Writing Begins	2.17	1.00
Think of New Ideas After Writing is Complete	2.17	.85
Write About What is Easiest for Them to Say Aloud	2.28	1.11

Key:
1=not important
2=somewhat important
3=important
4=very important

It must be pointed out that the following results need to be interpreted with caution, since the number (n= 52) of subjects participating in this study is small.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if there were differences in teachers' perceptions depending on their total number of years of teaching experience. In addition, an ANOVA was also conducted to determine whether there were differences in teachers' perceptions of writing strategies according to the number of years that they had been teaching LEP students.

The ANOVA results indicated that there were few statistically significant differences in teachers' perceptions of writing strategies according to the total number of years of teaching experience. Overall, the ANOVA results indicated statistically significant differences for the following writing strategies: Guess the Spelling of a Word; Use the Dictionary to Check Spelling; Revise to Facilitate Reader Understanding; and Change Plans Before Starting. Generally, teachers' with a greater number of years of teaching experience perceived these strategies more important than teachers with less teaching experience. For the strategy, Guess the Spelling of a Word, teachers with less than a year of teaching experience perceived this strategy as being less important than teacher who have had one or more years of teaching experience. Use the Dictionary to Check Spelling was similarly viewed as less important by teachers with fewer years of experience than by those with more (>3) teaching experience. The strategies, Revise to Facilitate Reader Understanding and Change Plans Before Starting were perceived by teachers with the greatest number of years (>7) of teaching experience as being more important than by teachers with fewer years (<6) of teaching experience.

There were very few statistically significant differences when examining by the number of years teaching LEP students . There were only two strategies that were statistically significant different: Revise to Change Meaning and Revise to Facilitate Reader Understanding. For Revise to Change Meaning, less experienced teachers (less than a year to 6 years) perceived this strategy as less important than teachers who had taught for more than seven years. For the strategy, Revise to Change Meaning and Revise to Facilitate Reader Understanding teachers with three or less years of teaching perceived this strategy as being less important than teachers who have taught for seven or more years.

Discussion

Overall, teachers who participated in this study perceived process-oriented strategies as the most important to teach LEP students. There were, however, three process-oriented strategies that teachers did not consider important and found difficult to teach. These included Imitating Styles of Good Writers, Revising to Change Meaning, and Changing Plans Before Starting to Write. These results differ from previous studies which have indicated that instruction in process-oriented strategies is not taking place in ESL classrooms. A possible explanation for the findings in the present study may be that all the teachers are enrolled in graduate level courses, and perhaps they have had the opportunity to learn about process-oriented instruction in writing. Therefore, these teachers may be more aware of the importance of these strategies, than teachers who have been in the field for many years without having received additional training.

It is interesting to note that the years of teaching experience had little effect on teachers' perceptions of writing strategies. The present study did indicate a few differences that were related to years of experience. The differences found in this study, however, must be viewed with caution. The results of this study are limited in that the sample was small and homogeneous population. Future studies need to examine the perceptions of a larger more diverse population of educators. Also, research needs to be conducted to help determine the extent to which teacher training affects teachers' implementation of strategy instruction. In addition, future studies need to examine whether the strategies that teachers view as important are the ones that are actually being taught to LEP students in their classrooms. In addition to observational studies that identify the strategies actually being taught by teachers, research also needs to examine the extent to which and how frequently are these strategies taught to LEP students. This type of information can help in developing more appropriate teacher training programs for teachers of LEP students.

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